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MY WOOD FIRES
AND THEIR STORY

MY WOOD FIRES AND THEIR STORY

SHOWING THE BEAUTY AND USE OF THE
WOOD FIRE: OF THE WAY TO SECURE GOOD
DRAUGHT AND COMBUSTION: OF THE NATIVE
WOODS BEST FOR FUEL: OF THE ABOLITION
OF THE FENDER: AND OF THE ECONOMY AND
VALUE OF WOOD AS FUEL. BY W. ^{1111-2m}ROBINSON
AUTHOR OF "THE ENGLISH FLOWER GARDEN"

LONDON

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THE SETTLE AN' THE GIRT WOOD VIRE

AH ! naighbour John, since I an' you
Wer youngsters, ev'ry thing is new.
My father's vires wer all o' logs
O' cleft-wood, down upon the dogs
Below our clavy, high, an' brode
Enough to teäke a cart an' lwoad,
Where big an' little all zot down
At bwoth zides, an' bevore, all roun'.

.
But they've a-wall'd up now wi' bricks
The vier pleäce vor dogs an' sticks,
An' only left a little hole
To teäke a little greäte o' coal,
So small that only twos or drees
Can jist push in an' warm their knees.

W. BARNES.

AIMS OF THE BOOK

SOME years ago I came into possession of an old Manor House, built in 1596, with much to be done to it. Worse than all were the fireplaces. They were in old days meant to burn wood, but had been diverted from their old uses to modern ones with little success. Old fire hearths had been closed up and ways tried to adapt the fireplaces to the use of coal, attempts mostly futile. Not one of them could be well used owing to smoke, and various contrivances to get rid of that nuisance were ineffectual.

With plenty of wood in the place it was wrong that the best of all fuels could not be well used in the house, and this led me to consider the problem in all ways. I have had so much pleasure in the result that I would like to convey it to others who are fortunate in having supplies of wood. Many people must be in the same plight, judging by the grates in country houses one sees pictured in the illustrated papers. It is a rarity to see the wood fire in its right place, and grates and various contrivances for getting a draught are used. So, without going into the theories of the matter or the laws that govern combustion

WOOD FIRES

and such things, I will state what was done to secure good wood fires and get rid of all drawbacks. It is little use talking to people in cities about wood fires, but in much of the wooded parts of the country there is an abundance of wood which in well-arranged fireplaces would give us the best and prettiest of fires. Such is the vogue of coal, however, that even on estates where wood is abundant, one may see people crowding round ugly iron grates trying to warm themselves; and there is an idea that you cannot be warmed with wood fires—a stupid mistake arising out of the fact that the good old way of managing wood fires is to a great extent lost. The modern buildings are no help to its revival with their narrow chimneys built for burning coal. Some of our chimneys were spoiled by narrow pipes, which were supposed to assist the draught, and old hearth fireplaces were fitted with grates, and in one way or another the old hearth fires were given up.

There is no fire so beautiful as a wood fire on the hearth. It is economical, too, if only in not having to remove a mass of coal-ash every morning.

The first thing I had to consider was to get effective fires, and then the question of draught came in, the narrow chimneys being useless for the burning of wood. Owing to closeness of construction the air in a room is not always sufficient to feed a wood fire; and therefore it is essential to bring the air in from outside, under and round the grate, up the sides and into the chimney. The

AIMS OF THE BOOK

air is thus heated automatically and rises just in the right place. This I learned in France, where the wood fire has survived to a much greater extent than with us.

The smaller the rooms, the greater the difficulty about draught and the more the need for bringing the air in from outside in the way described, i.e. a small tunnel leading in at the back of the fireplace. I have tried the plan in various houses with success. It is much easier to carry out when building a house; but even in old cottages where it has been applied it is successful.

A main question is that of the labour of cutting wood. In places where electric power and oil or other engines are used, it is a simple matter, and if one pays three shillings a cord for cutting it up by hand it is well worth the cost.

Another aim of mine in writing this book is to lead men to think more about trees for fuel in those parts of the country where woodland has been destroyed. There is much land of no real value for arable that might grow wood very well. Even a rough farm in the most profitless spots may well be planted. The growth and preparation of wood for fuel would also give opportunities for healthy open-air work, and the more of that we have for our workmen the better.

THE HALL FIRE

THIS hall fireplace has a story which should be told and remembered. The hall was built for me by a trusted architect, the late Mr. George Devey, who may have left the detail of the chimney to his clerk. But while the hearth was made for a wood fire, the chimney was so narrow that it could not be used for any but a coal fire, and not well for that. I endured the sight of it for some years, and could not get the chimney to work in any effective way ; but after consideration and under the benign influence of Sir Ernest George, I resolved to rebuild the chimney from a 9 in. by 9 in. to a 14 in. by 14 in. chimney. The workmen crept in the chimney like owls into a hollow oak tree, worked their way up, and gave me a chimney that has worked well ever since. Not only this chimney in the hall, but the one in a room above was useless for a wood fire ; but when all was done relief came, and no trouble has since arisen. In all cases where a fire is attempted in a hall of any size or in any important chamber of a house, the size of the chimney should be 14 in. by 14 in. if the hearth is to carry a wood fire. With a good draught the combustion of wood is

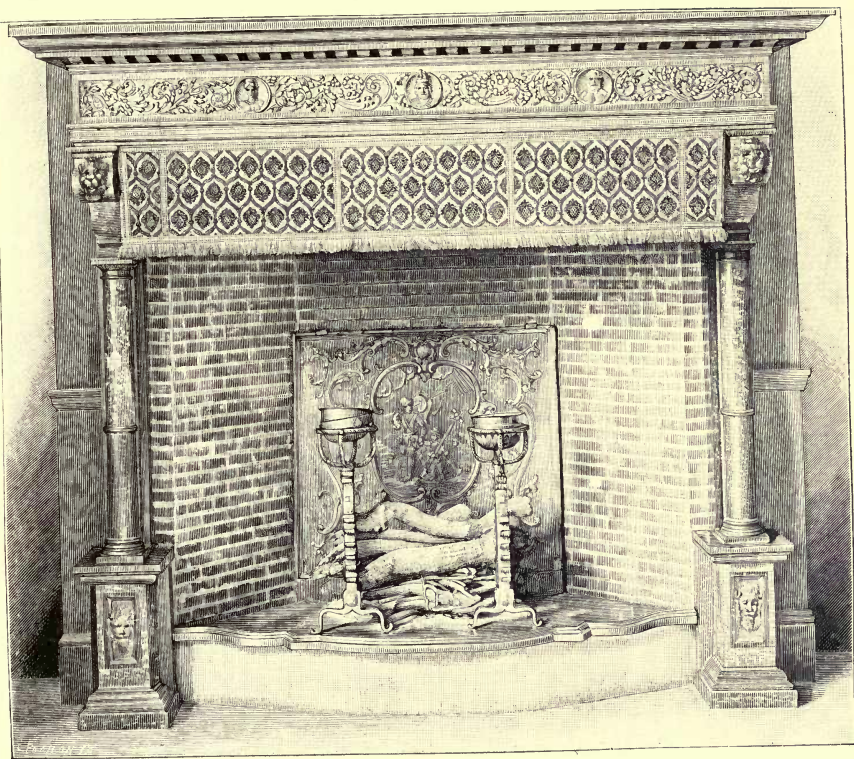


FIG. 1. HALL FIRE

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THE HALL FIRE

simple and easy ; even grubbed stumps of trees dissolve away and we have a good, comforting winter fire in the centre of the house. None of the considerations which apply to a coal fire should ever be thought of in connection with a wood fire. The wood ashes should not be removed for months at a time—this is not easy to explain to the maids of our day. Underwoods, now of very little value, afford extensive stores of neglected firewood. It is not merely the ghastly pall of smoke over London we have to complain of. My ponds are over thirty miles from what Cobbett called the “Wen,” and if the wind blows from the east for several days, the soot descends on them and a mass of greasy wreaths covers the surface of the water. Many miles north of London one may see the roses round a country house spotted with soot, yet while cities like Stockholm prohibit the defilement of their air, our statesmen take no notice of it. With our present knowledge, the smoke of London could be cured in three years if men would only face it as they ought.

It should be said as regards this fire in the hall that there is plenty of air without the need for the duct which is found so essential in closed rooms, the hall being directly connected with another inner hall and having doors and passages near, so that there is no want of air. It is as free in that way as the old large halls where there never was any difficulty about air.

Now, whatever may be done in regard to the other fires

WOOD FIRES

in a country house, a good wood fire in the hall should be worth an effort. It may be kept alive for nine months in the year, and in cold upland districts may well be kept alive all the year round. Where the pleasant way of making the hall a reception room exists, such a fire is all the more desirable.



COPPER : OLD DUTCH

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SITTING-ROOM FIRE IN OLD HALL

THIS hall, the largest room in the house, is where the people who built the house used to dine with their retainers. It had once a fire hearth of the old sort, but in the course of changes from a merchant's country house to an almost abandoned one the fireplace was altered and not for the better. When I saw it first it was in the time of the æsthetic craze of Oscar Wilde and others, and an attempt had been made to improve it. A basket grate was placed in the fireplace flanked by mirrors, with a sunflower painted on each, leaving just room enough to see one's boots reflected. We got rid of all this and found the old iron plate below a mass of concrete and other rubbish. But the chimney itself had not been tampered with, and it was not very difficult to get back to the old way so far as draught went. The hall is large enough to admit sufficient air to the chimney—in fact, an ample draught which saves the need of any other supply of air. The sides are splayed, and the flue does the rest. The fire is raised off the floor so as to give a good radiation and helps the draught. The fire-back is one from the Louvre time of Louis XIII.

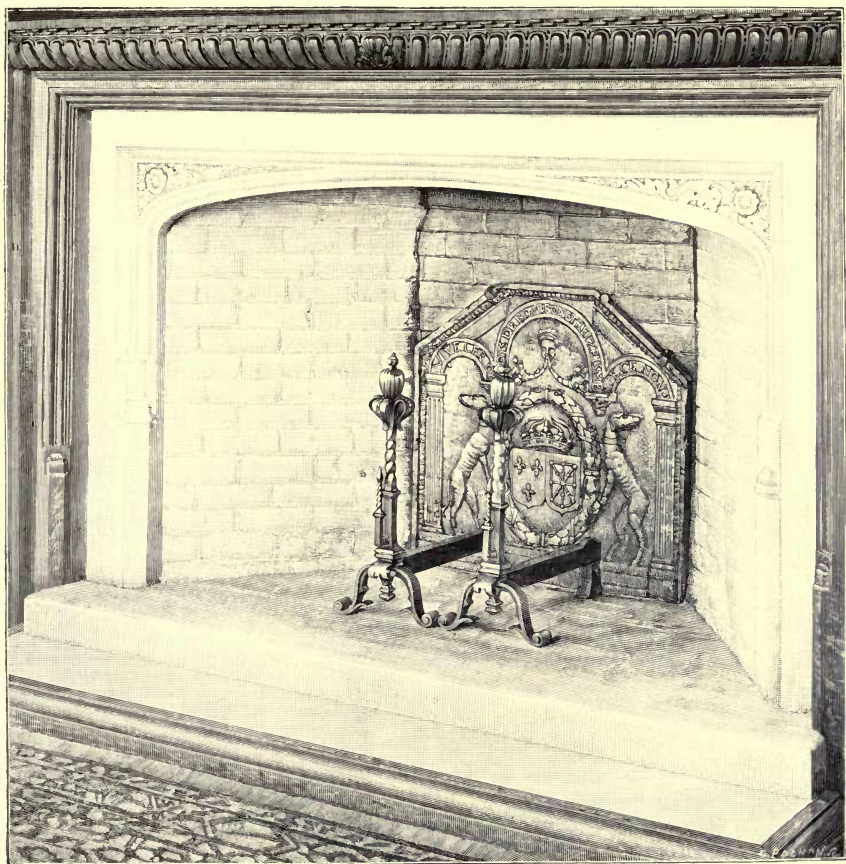


FIG. 2. SITTING-ROOM FIRE (OLD HALL)

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SMOKING ROOM

HERE we were fortunate in having an old roomy chimney, so there was nothing to alter in that way. The room is small, and the difficulty was that we could not get in air enough to feed the chimney without letting some in from outside in the way described in other cases. But here was an archway underneath the room, cutting off, as it was thought, any danger of fire in the furnace room. The consequence is that the door must be kept partly open.



FIG. 3. STUDY FIRE

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DINING-ROOM FIRE

THE dining-room fire, which broke out at 10:30 p. m. last night, was the first of the kind in the history of the city. The fire was caused by a gas stove, which had been left burning, and it spread rapidly, consuming the furniture and the walls. The fire was extinguished by the fire department, but the damage was considerable.

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DINING-ROOM FIRE

THE chimney of this room I built after learning the essential needs as to size and air. As the ceiling was solid fireproof material, the floor blocks of oak, and the windows of plate-glass in gun-metal frames, there was little room for air to feed a chimney of sufficient size for a large wood fire.

First of all, the chimney is fourteen by fourteen. The next thing was to bring in air from without to feed the shaft. The room being solidly constructed, there was not air enough to feed a chimney for a big wood fire, so we brought in a duct about ten inches from the outside under the hearthplate and up the fire-bricked sides of the fireplace, and thrown up the chimney just above the mantelpiece. To have put it in any other place near the fire would not have done at all so well. The air coming in from without was warmed automatically by passing under and around the fire, being drawn into the chimney at a slightly higher temperature, where it could not possibly do otherwise than rise up and carry the draught. This is shown in the illustration. From the first it has acted perfectly, and has never once failed us. The hearth, instead of being of tiles or brick, is an iron plate. To get

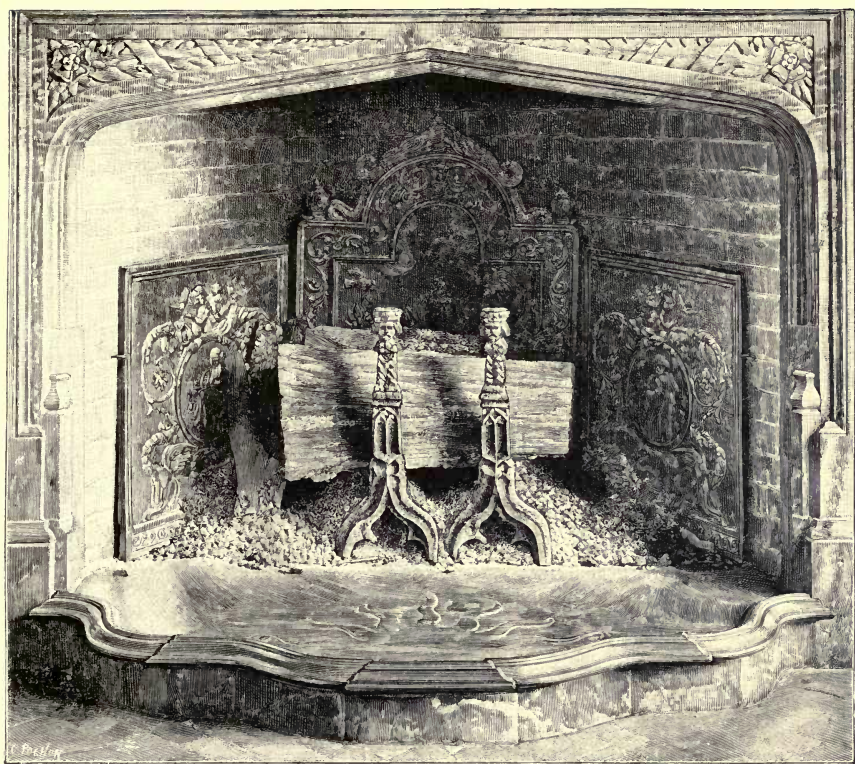


FIG. 4. DINING-ROOM FIRE

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DINING-ROOM FIRE

rid of the need of a fender we raised the hearth a little above the floor.

The permanent iron hearth and the abolition of the fender in every form is one of the best points in the fireplace. It came about in this way. The people who built the house, Richard and Katherine Infield, in the year 1596, were ironworkers here, and at the bottom of their fireplaces they put an iron plate, coming in line to the face of the wall, and these we found in making changes. They could not have put a better thing for wear, and when looking at these plates the idea came to me to advance them in order to take the place of the ordinary fender, and by raising the plates above the ground to secure a better draught. This we did in various cases, and always with a good result. Sir Ernest George came one day and, looking at my hearth, gave it his approval.

The present-day way of sinking the hearth to the floor-level is not the best way. From the wood fire one gets a better radiation if the hearth is raised ten inches or so above the floor, and we gain a point in draught also. In the case in point, the iron hearth is raised and supported on stone. Where the draught was sufficient, there was no reason for raising the hearth unduly. The plate is of stout metal, polished, and settles the question of hearth, fender and all for ever. A fender was always a hateful thing to me, and I was glad to get rid of it.

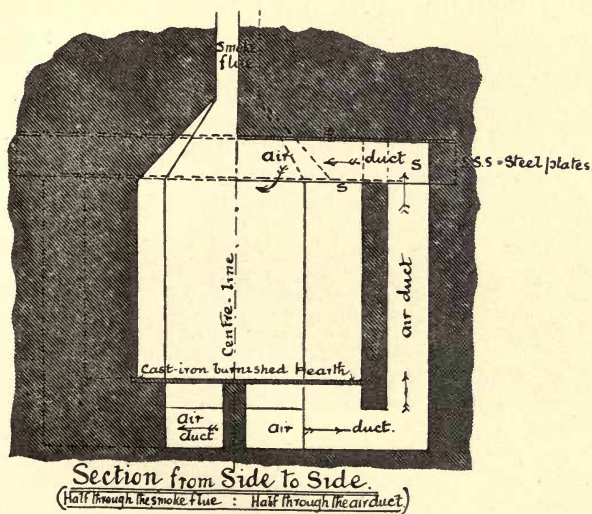
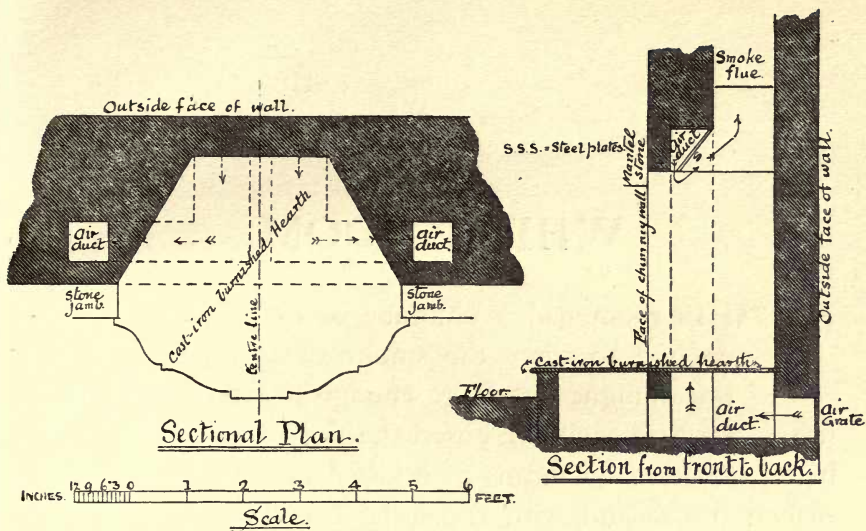


FIG. 5. PLAN AND SECTION OF DINING-ROOM FIREPLACE

WHITE ROOM

THIS room had a chimney of the old sort, wide enough to carry the smoke of a wood fire and the draught just large enough to feed a moderate fire. But here again we raised the fire in order to get a better radiation by means of a raised hearth made of red ruabon bricks and with the usual iron plate below the fire. Fire-back old French. Fire-dogs French.

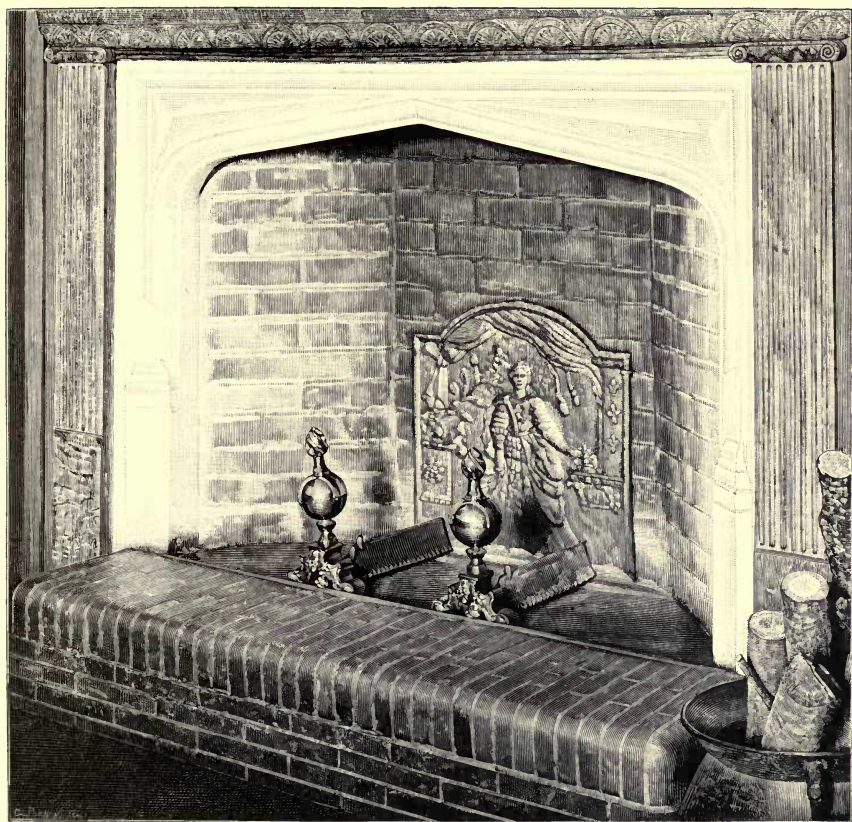


FIG. 6. WHITE ROOM HEARTH

ROSE ROOM

IN this old room the draught failed, and was but feebly mended by a glass curtain. Here the chimney was one of the old sort, large enough, but the hearth was on the ground level and the opening square. By splaying the sides and raising the hearth ten inches above floor level a cure was effected. The effect of the fire on the raised hearth was better and the radiation also.



FIG. 7. ROSE ROOM FIRE

BOOK ROOM

AN airy room, but to make sure of a good draught we had the air brought in through a grill in the wall. For some years we endured the dismal result of a narrow chimney, i.e. not built to carry the smoke of a wood fire, and it gave but a bad coal fire on the hearth. By rebuilding the chimney 14 by 14 from the hall upwards this room benefited at the same time. We have now a good fire at all times, and no smoke even in the wildest weather. The hearth is of burnished iron, 10 inches, also supported on stone; fire dogs, old English; fire-back, old Flemish. Bender for kettle, Sussex, in use in cottages in Ashdown forest.

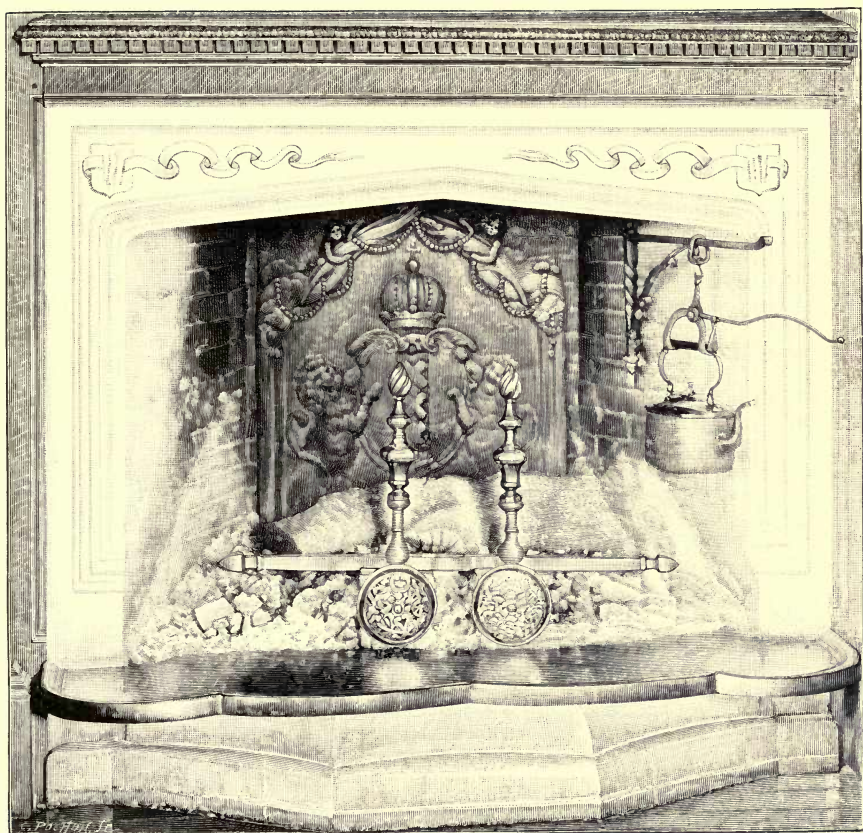
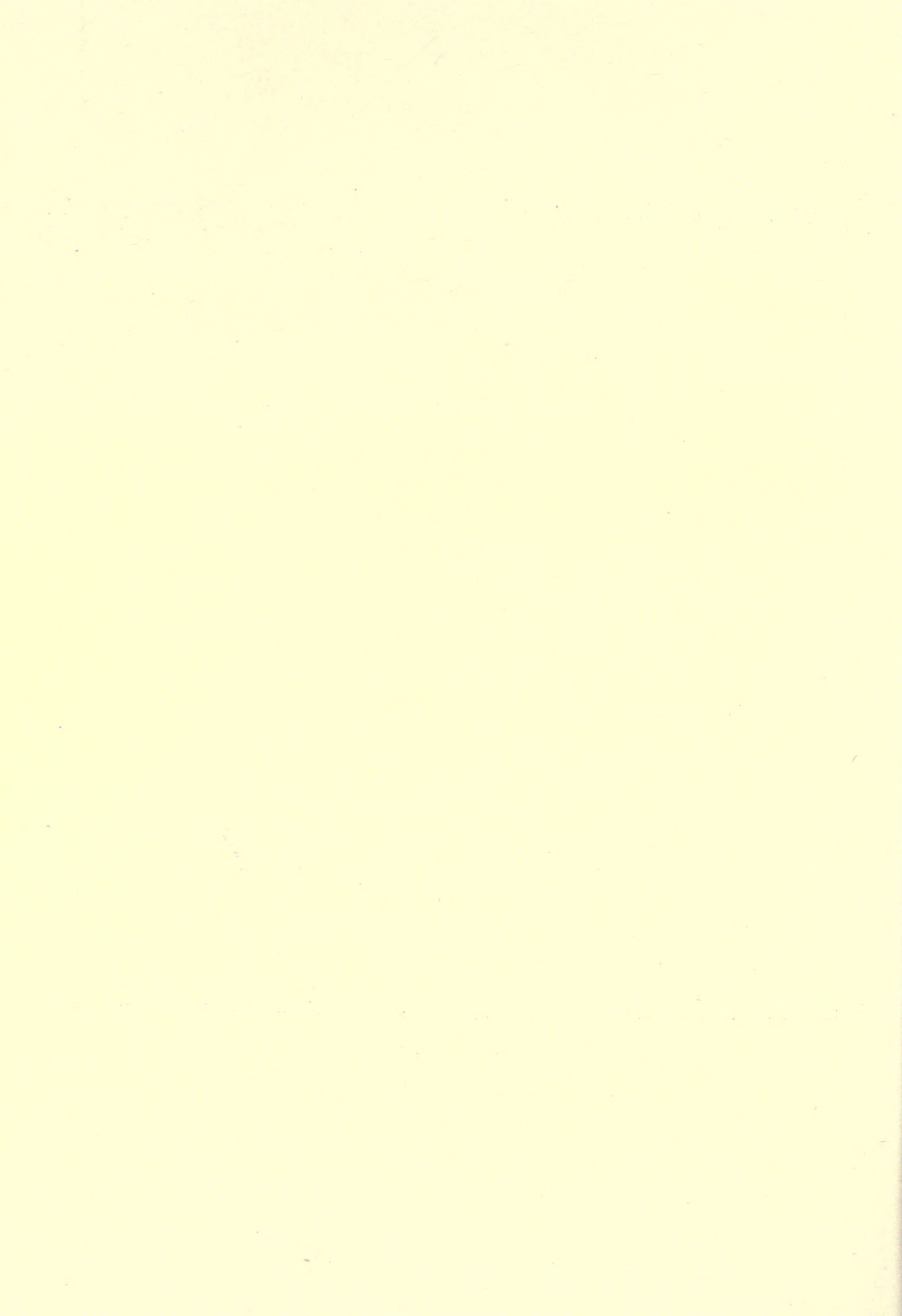


FIG. 8. BOOK-ROOM FIRE

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OLD OAK ROOM. BEDROOM FIRE

THIS is the best bedroom fire I have ever seen. At first it was a square hole in the wall with a dead draught. The chimney was all right, being an old one, and roomy enough to take the smoke of a wood fire. Various little dodges were tried before, mostly ineffectual, among them a glass curtain, but all futile to aid the draught. By filling the "dead" corners in and skewing to a narrow back we were successful, also by raising the terraced hearth in lieu of the flat one we improved the draught at once. We have never had any trouble since, and in a few moments by means of some sticks we can get boiling water in the morning. For this the "bender" is very handy; there is no need to touch the kettle in pouring off. The terraced hearth is a little higher than usual, and so we get the right fender.

This fireplace is so narrow at back that logs cannot be set across, but must be leaned in towards the back. The air in the room is just sufficient to feed the chimney; an oak panel between it and a dressing-room helps the

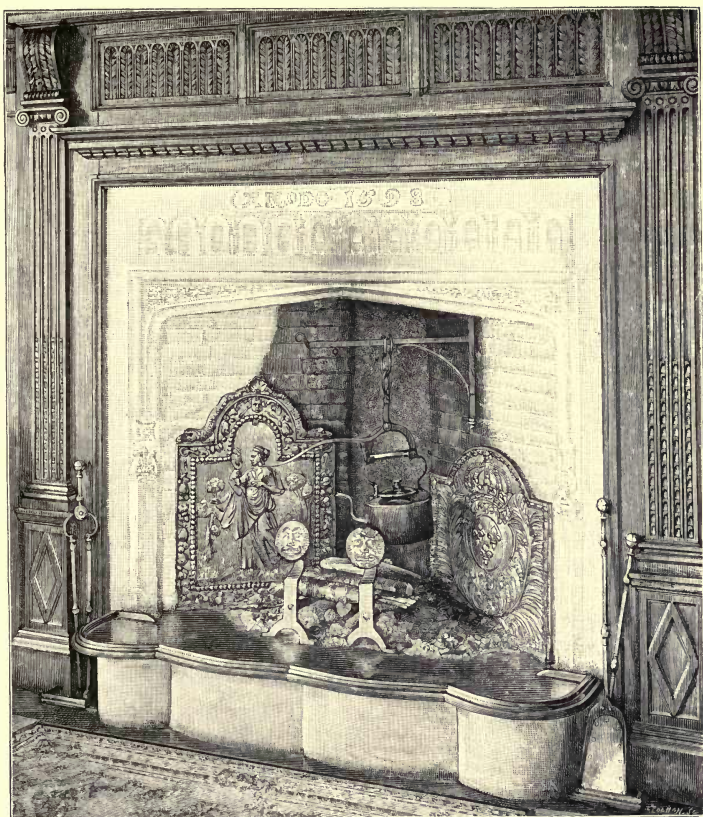
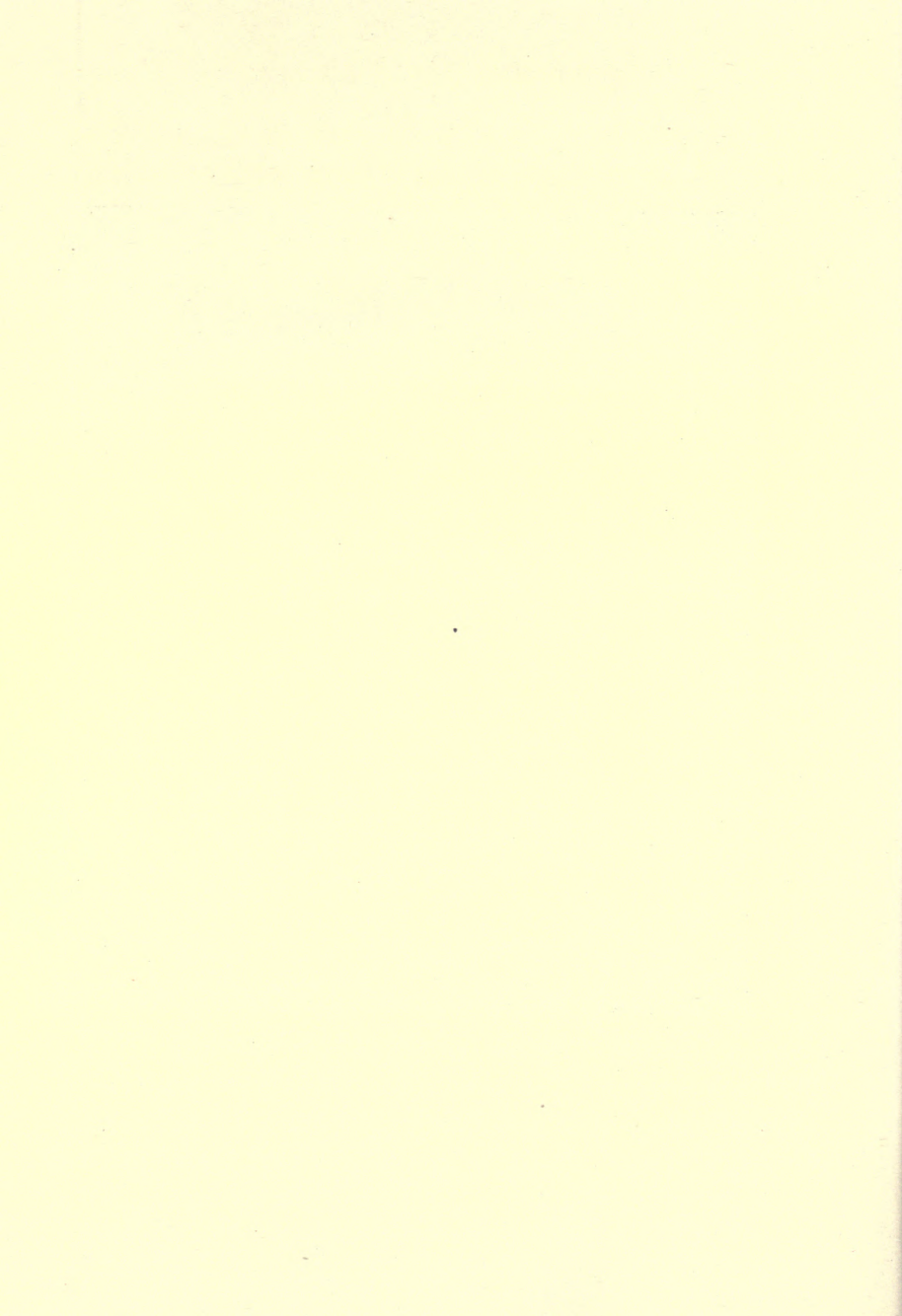


FIG. 9. OLD OAK BEDROOM FIRE

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BEDROOM FIRE

inlet of air a little. There is no want of air, and the conduct of air through a duct from outside is not needed.

THE MOAT COTTAGE

When I were young the hearths were all made for 'ood burning: and right enough, wi' all the 'oods about. Then railways and the rest comes along, and when the old hearths were done up they changed them all for coal. Not half so good, not half, not half, nor half so clean.—GAMBIER PARRY, *Allegories of the Land*.

THE moat cottage was for years one of those old farmhouse cottages that had no chimneys as we now know them, but a vast cavern going up through the middle of the house and allowing the rain and snow to come in freely. The whole interior was black, and how people managed to live with it nobody knows, but they lived mostly outdoors. I lived there myself while the big house was being mended, and before any change was made. The doors could not be kept closed owing to the smoke from the hearth. Then we brought in air from outside, as shown in previous articles, but it was not so easily done because of the cavernous and vast extent of the chimney. Then we closed that in; building a hood over and into the fireplace, we led an air duct from the outside, under the floor, and threw it in as usual just above the breast of the dome; and here, as elsewhere, with complete success. The room being a small one there was

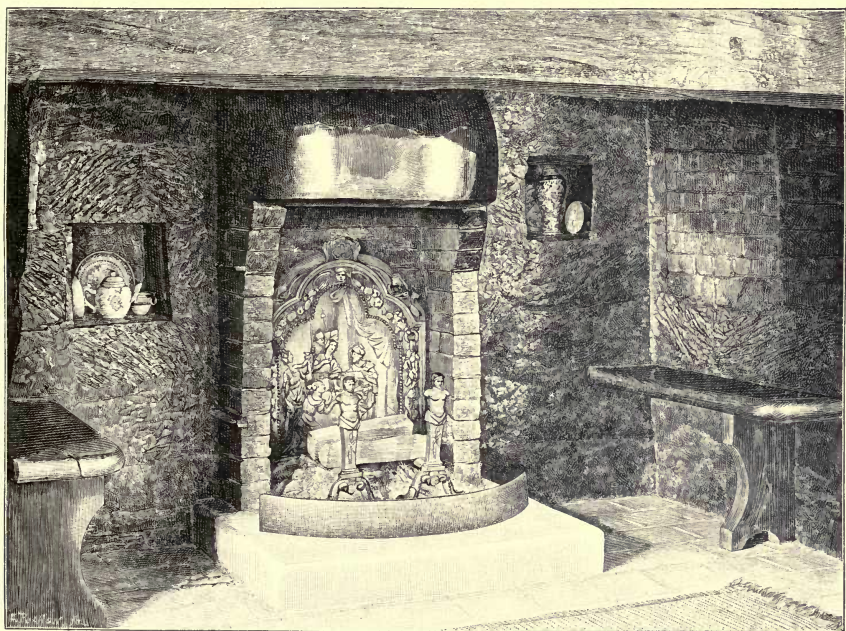


FIG. 10. MOAT COTTAGE FIREPLACE

To face page 30



THE MOAT COTTAGE

not air enough in it to feed the vast chimney, or indeed any chimney burning wood, and the only resource therefore was to bring the air in from outside the house, splitting it into two channels to feed the chimney and turn it into the dome-capped fireplace. The plan was a complete success here, as in every other cottage where it was fairly tried.

THE BENDER

THIS simple contrivance we found most useful for moving a kettle in any direction and pouring out water without soiling the hands. It was made for me by a local smith after a pattern in use in cottages around here for many years. He told me of it and I adopted it. Given the pattern, any smith should be able to make it easily.



FIG. 11. THE BENDER

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VARIOUS AIDS

ANY sort of wicker work near a fire is a source of danger, and I have always avoided wicker paper baskets and wicker wood baskets. The baskets for wood are made of wrought iron, and any village smith should be able to make them.

In most houses fire-guards are essential, and the one shown in the illustration is old French.

Fire-dogs of the old sort are essential.

The enduring hearth is made of polished iron. This was suggested by an old fire hearth I found in the house, but these only came well to the wall and were not raised; whilst mine are always raised above the floor, and we get better heat so. The fire-dogs are mostly of old Sussex make; some of French, these always better in design.

What are called pimps in the district are essential to the proper working of a wood fire, and this, which is an old Dutch dairy basin of some sort, has served our purpose very well.

WORKING THE WOOD FIRE

Come, bring a log o' cleft wood, Jack,
An' fling en on ageän the back,
An' zee the outside door is vast,—
The win' do blow a cwoldish blast.

WITHOUT a down hearth no good wood fire can be made. Substitutes in the way of grates in any shape are useless for burning wood. After a good draught, the first essential is a fireplace with a solid hearth. One modern way of making fires is to sink them in the hearth, even below the floor-level. That is not the best way. Warmth is greater if the fires are raised above the level of the floor—say 10 inches.

Ashes.—The ashes must be kept long on the hearth, and must never be removed altogether. This is a stumbling-block to the town maid, who is used to take away a bucket of cinders from a coal fire every morning. The old people knew how to manage wood fires, and often kept the ashes all through the summer nicely combed up. A good wood fire is not to be had without plenty of ashes, and it takes some little time for them to gather, so we never throw them away.

With wood ashes we can keep the fire in all night if

WORKING THE WOOD FIRE

need be by making a hollow in the ashes and putting half-burnt sticks into it and covering over with dead ashes. This, if rightly done, gives us a glowing nest of fire in the morning, and makes the kindling of the brands an easier matter.

Renewal of the fire.—In a rightly made fireplace with plenty of ashes the old way was to throw a brand on only now and again, and that sufficed to keep the fire going. In houses that keep up a big fire in the hall it is best to have at the back a log of elm, a slow-burning wood, or a rough oak log.

Waste of wood.—It takes time to show people the mistake of piling up logs. It is easy to waste three times the amount of wood needed. The best way is to keep the fire low and gentle. In early days here I found the maids put several basket-loads of wood on the fire only to waste it. The old people who made the fires and had no choice as to fuel learned how to make the most of their wood. Renew by throwing the wood on the back of the fire, and not in front, where the burning brands should be. Half-burnt brands should be pulled off the fire at bedtime and stood on one side—they are an aid to making a quick fire in the morning. All wood for fires to be in a proper state for burning should be stored in the dry for a year or so.

The removal of the ashes will depend on the frequency of the use of the fire. If the fire is in constant use, as in a

WOOD FIRES

hall, the ashes should be left until they begin to roll out towards the floor, and then only a portion of them removed, so as to leave a good bed for the fire always. Even in summer the ash should be neatly banked up and not disturbed otherwise until the raw autumn days tell us when a fire is needed.

Small bundles of wood pimps are a great aid. These are usually about a foot long, and made up of small twigs of birch or hazel. Larger bundles, about 18 in. to 2 ft. long, may often be made from the worn sticks used in fences. These are very useful when a quick fire is desired.



FIG. 12. FIRE-GUARD (OLD FRENCH)

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WOOD FIRES IN LONDON

FOR many generations London people have been resigned to being half poisoned by the filth of Newcastle coal. Heating in various ways, gas and electricity have in many ways lessened the dismal effect of coal; but we who love wood fires might do something more in that direction, as in Paris, where one sees handsome stacks of wood along the quays well cut and well packed up. The woods around London are full of wood of very little use except for firewood, and where there is no market for wood one ought certainly to use it at home. In many parts of France, Hungary, and Central Europe they have good wood fires, chiefly in closed stoves, which we might do well to imitate. Cooking for epicures should always be done with wood, especially in roasting, and the charcoal bench should always be in use with the good cook. For a room in a house of any artistic pretence a wood fire would be a great gain, because of, among other reasons, its greater cleanliness. Where a coal fire is used the servant has to remove a bucketful of ashes every morning, but with a wood fire properly worked the ashes need not be taken away for months at a time. A friend of mine who lives in London, seeing the fires here,

WOOD FIRES

thought he would try what he could do in a town house. He succeeded perfectly well, because in building the house he was able to supply the essential air. The space being limited and the rooms small it would have been hopeless without that. His note which follows and the illustration show clearly what was done in his case.

“When I had rebuilt the old seventeenth-century house which stood on this site—here in Westminster—I decided to retain the old method of heating which had evidently been in use in the old house for a number of years after it was built, namely, the old fires of wood, burning right on the hearth, with fire-dogs. Being anxious to preserve the old style of hearth, and fortunately able through your advice, and with the aid of a good architect—Mr. W. F. Troup—to accomplish what I wanted.

“I had seen enough of your splendid cleanly wood fires, scenting the whole atmosphere of the house, at Gravetye, appreciating the delight and advantages derived from them, to make me want to eliminate the use as far as possible of any form of coal in open grates.

“Needless to say, the fires are the delight of everyone who comes here. They are very satisfactory, and far more so than any coal fire could be. They are much more pleasant than coal fires, and give ample heat, and they are practically no trouble. The ash is seldom removed—not more than two or three times a year with a fire in

WOOD FIRES IN LONDON

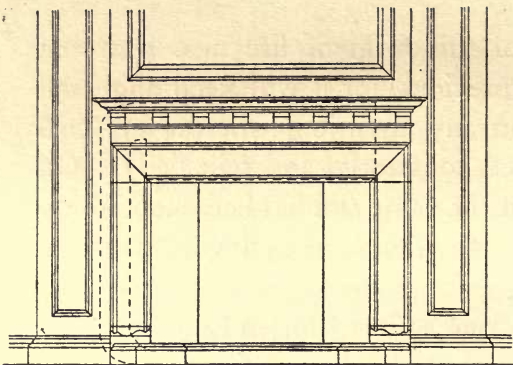
constant use. This accumulation of ash forms a bed, which during the winter months is always warm, and the fire lights promptly and easily with the aid of a small faggot or pimp.

“The convenience of this form of fire in a bedroom in times of sickness is precious, for it will keep alight all through a night without any attention, whereas any coal fire has to be replenished constantly, and relit daily. On more than one occasion the same fire has been kept going thirty consecutive days and nights, not allowing it to go out at all!

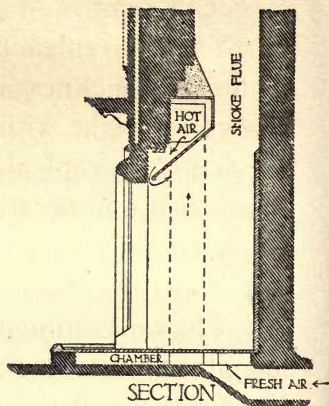
“The only difficulty one suffers from in London where log fires are used, is the small storage accommodation for the wood in houses, and following from that, some difficulty in having a sufficiency of regular supplies. The fact that hardly anyone has log fires in our larger towns and cities results in there being no demand for wood and no stocks at hand. It is therefore necessary for anyone with log wood fires to be able to store an ample quantity, and this, generally speaking, cannot be done. When having this house built I devoted all the space possible to the storage of logs, but it is not sufficient to ensure a constant supply. Logs are bulky. I reckon that in a space which will accommodate four to five tons of coal not more than two tons of wood can be stored.

“Yours very truly,

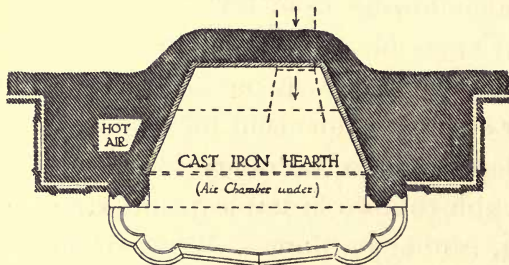
“H. G. SPICER.”



ELEVATION



SECTION



PLAN

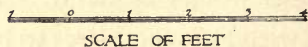


FIG. 13. PLAN AND SECTIONS OF HEARTH FIRE IN LONDON HOUSE

COOKING WITH WOOD FIRES

THERE can be little doubt of the merit of the wood fire for warming living rooms; but the question of cookery is not so clear. Some of us think it is still the best way even for cooking, and think it a great pity that the wood fire has gone out of use for that purpose. The British kitchen range is a costly affair, and dragging coals from Newcastle to feed it often too expensive. Our cooks have lost the knack of cooking by wood fires. Frenchwomen, where wood is abundant, can cook a good dinner with a simple down fire and a small charcoal bench. In the best clubs and restaurants of Paris wood is used for roasting. A Frenchman I know, who lives in the Bordeaux region, thought he could do better by adopting the best English range, but finding the cooking with it quite inferior, he pulled it out and was glad to go back to the old wood fire.

The cheap coal has led to the idea that it is the only way, and so the filth of Newcastle coal pollutes the air round the country house, and often it spoils the beauty of things near.

The difficulty of the open coal grate might be got over if our ironfounders would devise a wood-burning range to suit the cook, as is done in Hungary and other wooded

WOOD FIRES

regions of the Continent. Such ranges are made in Vienna and in Buda-Pesth. In one large house I saw the cooking for over thirty persons done with success where nothing but wood was used. The wood must be seasoned and of the right size. Nothing we can do can help the townsman to get wood fires for his cookery, but where wood is in plenty in the country it should be used, and it should be an economy to use it.

Think of men working thousands of feet underground to get for us fuel that might be grown in the woods around us! Such is the force of custom in the trade that if we seek to adapt the hearth for wood we get hardly any help from the range maker: questions were put to me as—“Can you be warmed by a wood fire?” ignoring the fact that the best cooking in Europe is done with wood and by the charcoal bench for stewing and braising.

The power of growth in a well-planted wood is so great every year that I have often thought that if our coal were to become exhausted all the fuel that was wanted for lighting and heating could be got from planting the waste land in many districts. There are millions of acres of such land now in Britain which might be planted with profit. In woodland districts the old cottage down fire should be kept where it exists, and the big kettle for warm water and the bender, as shown in this book, will be a help to it. The cottage as well as the mansion deserves that the roses growing around it should not be defiled by city



FIG. 14. WOOD BASKET (WROUGHT IRON)

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COOKING WITH WOOD FIRES

smut. The Italians are very instructive in the ways they cook their simple food and boil their coffee over little fires made of pine cones and a few twigs. Their climate makes this easy for most of the year, but in our country we must have a warming fire for more than half the year. In these days of the thoughts of the simple life many should be able to manage with a wood fire more than we do, and it should be within the power of the foundry to give us a good kitchener roomy enough to burn wood.

WOOD FIRES FOR GARDEN MEN

IN our variable climate shelters in gardens are wanted for various good ends; among others for men's meals and for wet days when work out-of-doors cannot be done. A good, easily managed wood fire is therefore essential in a country place of any size. It is not unusual to see coal burnt in a grate in such sheds, the coal brought miles from a distant railway station and in places in which there is plenty of wood. I was once in a house in Devonshire where there were hundreds of acres of woodland near, and saw the inhabitants trying to keep warm round a coal fire in a grate ugly with heavy iron bars.

In many gardens and grounds near the house, owing to the overplanting of rampant evergreens, there is usually much wood that wants clearing, and trees also out of place, like solitary cedars, that the wind knocks over. These might be a source of wood to feed the fire on the hearth. There should be no grate, but the simple old-fashioned down hearth. Any boy can light such a fire, and a well-made hearth will last for generations—unlike

WOOD FIRES FOR GARDEN MEN

the flimsy kitcheners and grates that often get out of order. Such a fire may often be fed from the refuse wood of the garden and pleasure-ground.

The mixed muddle shrubberies that pretended landscape gardeners plant are a frequent source of fuel as the ill-chosen trees begin to kill each other. The woodlands in a place of any size should give plenty of "batwood" for burning from the mixed underwood which has to be cleared periodically.

In every place where wood is well used there ought to be a comfortable shed for the woodmen to work in on days when work out-of-doors cannot be done. It should be open in front and have a sound roof. The back may be against a shelter, but the front should be open to the sun and air. Near should be, as in this case, a shed for housing tools, and any empty sheds or barn near might be used for storing wood.

In such a wood-shed many things of use in gardens may be prepared, such as posts and rails for fences, gate-posts, stakes for peas and climbing beans. The use of wire on walls is not so picturesque as the old way of training on oak and chestnut stakes, and these can be easily made in bad weather by the woodmen.

A recent gale has thrown over many fine trees, not only common ones like elm, beech, and fir, but also some more precious ones, like the cedar of Lebanon. Very often this loss occurs where there is no means of using all

WOOD FIRES

the branch wood in the right way—that is, the old hearth fireplace, best raised 8 in. to 10 in. above floor level, a good draught and good level hearth of fire-brick, or, as I prefer, a rough cast-iron plate and iron fire-back, too. Every country house should have such fireplaces.

A thing worth considering is the black filth of the Newcastle coal as it affects delicate flowers near the house. Before I mastered the question of wood fires my tea roses round the house were often dotted with the blacks of this coal. The adoption, therefore, of wood fires for hall and sitting-room would be a great gain to the flower garden.



FIG. 15. WOOD SHED AND STORE (GRAVETYE)

To face page 46

BRITISH WOODS FOR THE FIRE

AT first sight one would think that resinous woods would give excellent fuel, and the best, but as to open fires there are drawbacks to their use. The best native woods for the fire are those of our own country, the summer leafing trees of the ordinary woodland. The pines will burn well in an enclosed furnace, and are often used in Central Europe for that purpose; but in the open fire the pine sparks about strongly. Some trees of the pine tribe we may have to burn, such as the cedar, which, when it falls, one cannot do better than burn, and pleasant wood it is. But the best wood of all to burn is

THE OAK.—In our country it is often grown in a spreading way, and has often more wood in the branches than in the stem. We can sell the tree but not the boughs, and they may usually be had for a low price by the cord.

Oak cordwood, after a year in the dry, makes the best native firewood. Barked as it often is when cut, it is the best of fuel for the big down fire.

WOOD FIRES

BEECH.—Next in value is the beech, which is a common tree of our country, and indeed it is in all Europe, from Denmark to Greece. It also is much grown in the much-branching way, and when the trees are cut down there is much cordwood to spare, and good fuel it is if used about a year or more after being cut down.

ASH.—The ash is a tree of great area in our own country, and very graceful in form in singly grown trees which few would care to cut down, but it occurs freely in woods in all parts of the country. It is one of the few trees which burn when freshly cut. One may see the men here cooking their breakfasts with the small branches cut down early the same morning. It is excellent quality for firewood, often showing a beautiful colour while burning. Those who plant timber with the view of having fuel in good time should not neglect the ash.

HORNBEAM.—Next to the ash comes the hornbeam, but in my district this grows rarely, and I have not had the chance of testing its quality as fuel, but it is said to be first rate for that purpose. It does not love our stiff land and is best in open gritty or rocky soils.

BIRCH.—Birch, which sows itself freely in many woods, is not of great value in our country as timber. It seems to

BRITISH WOODS FOR THE FIRE

have some value in Northern Europe, as we may see there woods of it with silver stems. In our country, where it is often in the way of other trees, the best one can do is to use it as firewood, and very good it is.

In all the underwood country of the home counties there is much of what is called batwood—that is, mixed wood of no particular use, which is best turned into firewood. And kept long enough in the dry it makes a very good fire in a fireplace of the right sort, with plenty of ash under it. There is a lot of it to spare not only in underwoods, but in the shape of overgrown fences and worn-out orchard trees of all kinds.

ELM.—The common field elm, which is frequent in many parts of the country, though not a native tree, we have to deal with often. It makes poor firewood, but the old people used its logs at the back of the fire, when it would burn for days. To have a good log at the back of the fire is the right way. Our native elm (wych) has about the same value as firewood.

POPLARS AND ALDER.—The common poplars are of very little use for firing. The alder is one of the worst woods for this purpose, but mixed with batwood and underwood growths it will burn well after being a year in the dry.

WOOD FIRES

THE PLANE TREE.—Mr. A. D. Webster writes : “ The wood of the plane tree is equally good, if not preferable, to either oak or beech. It burns with a clear, clean flame, does not emit sparks, and gives out a great heat ; but what we valued it most for was the unusually bright, clear flame emitted. Apple, pear, hornbeam, and yew are all good, last long, and are good heat-givers, but for an all-round comfortable fire give me the plane. I know that plane wood is scarce, but that does not alter its value for firewood ; and the one I refer to is the eastern plane (*Platanus orientalis*), the common London plane.”

THE HOLLY.—Queen of evergreens, this is too precious to be sacrificed for fuel, but in country places infested with rabbits, after hard winters one may see wholesale destruction of fine hollies in woods. The trees completely barked round die above the injury, and so one has no choice but to cut them down, and the wood burns well.

Trees of the pine tribe (I omit the native and common known trees) that have for many years been planted in our country, too often placed singly, where they are blown over frequently by winds, and so come in for use as firing. The difficulty with them is that the logs give out sparks which in a room are dangerous and unpleasant. The suggestion herein made is that with kitcheners made expressly to burn wood that difficulty

BRITISH WOODS FOR THE FIRE

could be got over. The larch is the commonest tree of its race. The branches of this tree can be used as fuel, and the trimmings the men cut off when dressing the trees are excellent for helping a fire.

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